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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002955

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FAILS SHORT ON FIRST IMPEACHMENT VOTE;
NEXT STEPS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for reason 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: The pro-impeachment opposition on November 9 tried and twice failed to create a special Congressional committee to consider impeachment grounds against President Lucio Gutierrez, effectively stymieing impeachment efforts at an early stage. The opposition came up short of taking this second formal step in the impeachment process, after defections by two Social Christian Party (PSC) members and one Democratic Left (ID) impeachment petition signers. The failed vote spells a reprieve or at least temporary respite for Gutierrez, since to impeach requires a two thirds vote, currently well out of reach of the opposition. Government officials tried not to gloat in the wake of the vote; some privately expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's statements in support of democratic stability. Disgruntled impeachment supporters are seeking alternative means to restart the impeachment process, but are unlikely to prosper until after the next Gutierrez administration blunder. End Summary.

12. (U) Congress voted twice on November 9 to conform the special impeachment committee. The first resulted in 50 votes in favor, one short of a simple majority, with 40 abstentions. President of Congress Guillermo Landazuri voted in favor, but PSC deputy Rocio Jaramillo of Guayas province abstained. PSC Congressional leader Pascual del Cioppo later declared that Jaramillo had been "bought" by the President. In a second vote later in the day, Jaramillo was absent, and two other impeachment petition signers abstained, resulting in just 48 votes in favor. The two defectors included another from the PSC (Luis Almeida, who resigned from the PSC, denouncing threats and abuse from party leader Leon Febres-Cordero and saying he could not vote against Gutierrez, a fellow member of the masonic rite) and one from the ID (Aurelio Llori, who announced his resignation from the party).

Embassy Actions

13. (C) To promote democratic stability and US interests, we have engaged privately and publicly with key interlocutors, stressing USG support for electoral democracy and (with the opposition) the costs of political instability. The Ambassador most recently did so at an unrelated joint public event with President Gutierrez in the National Palace on November 5. PolOffs emphasized the political costs to PSC and ID Congressional and party leaders. Embassy PAS conducted extensive public outreach on the U.S. elections, emphasizing respect for the will of the electorate and democratic process.

14. (C) Recognizing that President Gutierrez' personal combativeness has fueled the increasingly personal feud with Febres-Cordero, the Ambassador spoke with Gutierrez several times as the impeachment process played out in Congress, offering moral support and counseling public restraint. She also reached out to several other cabinet members (Commerce, Economy, Defense and even Health) to signal continued USG engagement on issues of mutual interest during this difficult period.

15. (C) We are grateful for the interest and support from the Department to implement this pro-stability strategy, particularly A/S Noriega's interest and DAS Shapiro's public outreach with key Ecuadorian media.

16. (C) We also see great opportunities coming up to use VIP visits to reinforce the stability message. These include:

-- Commerce/USTR visit on November 12. Public speeches and private meetings with US companies offer opportunities for public diplomacy.

-- SecDef Rumsfeld/Southcom Commander visit November 15-20. They will meet with President Gutierrez and the MOD, and have press opportunities.

-- The visit by former President Bush on November 22 to Guayaquil. We will suggest that he include stability points in his public address and be wary of efforts by former

President Febres-Cordero to steal the limelight.

Comment

17. (C) The opposition is smarting from their setback in Congress, which reflects divisions within their ranks. The PSC has reportedly begun to woo the PRE, which had hoped to gain the return of its exiled leader by supporting the GoE. Privately, some opposition members have expressed relief that the impeachment process, which lacks strong grassroots support, has been short-circuited. Others, including the MPD's die-hard radicals and also some within indigenous Pachakutik, clearly resent the USG in the person of the Ambassador for what they incorrectly interpret as USG intervention in support of the person of President Gutierrez, and a few have called for her withdrawal. We have emphasized to all that this is a misinterpretation of our position, which is in support of democratic institutional stability, not any individual politician. We believe it exceedingly important to continue to make that distinction, to preserve the option to distance ourselves in the event that the President make anti-democratic moves or should hard evidence of corruption emerge against him.

KENNEY